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NASA AND VIRGIN GALACTIC TO EXPLORE FUTURE COOPERATION

MOFFETT FIELD, Calif. - NASA officials Tuesday announced they have signed an agreement with a U.S. company, Virgin Galactic, LLC, to explore collaborations on development of future space systems and support to commercial human spaceflight activities.

Under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), NASA Ames Research Center, located in the heart of California's Silicon Valley, and Virgin Galactic, LLC, a U.S. subsidiary of Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Group, will explore possible collaborations in several technical areas, including hybrid rocket motors and hypersonic vehicles capable of traveling five or more times the speed of sound, employing NASA Ames' unique capabilities and world-class facilities.

"As we constantly seek to build upon the advances made by explorers who have come before us, we now embark upon an exciting time in space exploration history that realizes the unlimited opportunities presented by a commercial space economy," said Shana Dale, NASA's deputy administrator. "By encouraging such potential collaborations, NASA supports the development of greater commercial collaboration and applications that will serve to strengthen and enhance the future benefits of space exploration for all of mankind."

Dale is a longtime supporter of commercial space development. She is the former staff director of the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics who was instrumental in the passage of the Commercial Space Act of 1998. This legislation encourages commercial space development in a variety of areas, including launch vehicles, the International Space Station and the acquisition of space and Earth science data.

"This understanding with Virgin Galactic affords NASA an opportunity to work with an emerging company in the commercial human space transportation industry to support

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the agency's exploration, science and aeronautics mission goals," said S. Pete Worden, director of Ames. "Our location in California's Silicon Valley provides a dynamic research and development platform for future potential collaborations with other such companies in support of a robust commercial space industry."

"We are excited to be working with NASA and look forward to future collaborations in exploration and space travel," said Alex Tai, chief operating officer for Virgin Galactic. "Commercial human spaceflight is a new and exciting industry. We are concentrating on sub-orbital spaceflight right now, but are really looking forward to exploring opportunities for the future and making hypersonic point-to-point travel a reality. We take a long-term view with the Virgin Group and with Virgin Galactic, we will push the boundaries of imagination further than any other industry we have so far entered - sub-orbital flights are only the beginning," Tai added.

"This agreement is specifically aimed at future systems beyond our current sub-orbital program with The Spaceship Company and Scaled Composites," said Tai. The Spaceship Company, (TSC) Mojave, Calif., is a joint venture between Scaled Composites LLC, also Mojave, Calif., and the Virgin Group that will manufacture spacecraft for the emerging industry. Scaled Composites has responsibility for development of the prototype sub-orbital system, as well as future projects for TSC.

NASA's Space Portal, a newly formed organization in the NASA Research Park at Ames, negotiated the agreement with Virgin Galactic. The Space Portal seeks to engage new opportunities for NASA to promote the development of the commercial space economy.

"This new type of private-public partnership can benefit the agency while helping to foster a new industry," said Dan Coughlin, NASA's lead for the Virgin Galactic agreement.

The memorandum of understanding will be in effect for two years and stipulates that neither NASA nor Virgin Galactic will be required to pay any fees or provide funds to support the areas of possible collaboration.

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